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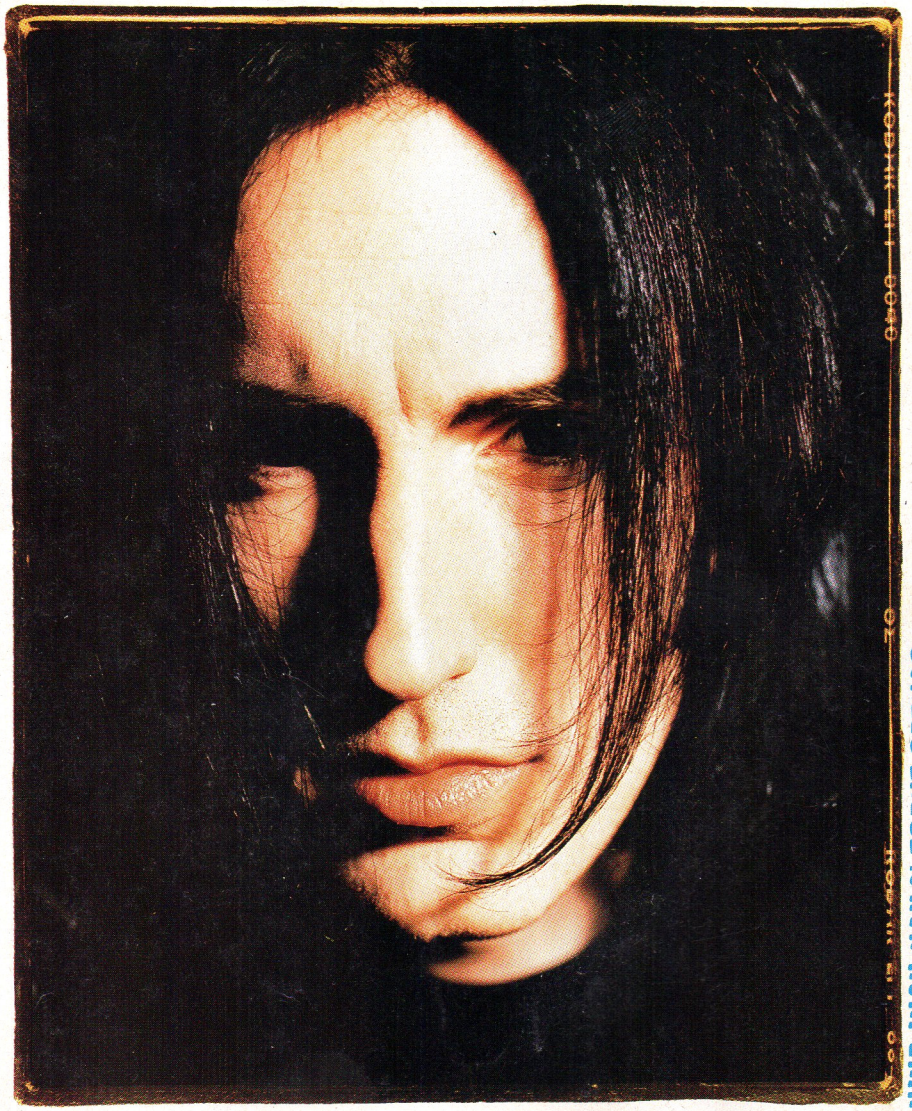

NINE INCH NAILS' TRENT REZNOR

MAY 31, 1994

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ALICE IN CHAINS' COMPLETE CD CATALOGUE AUTOGRAPHED BY LAYNE, JERRY, SEAN AND MIKE

NINE INCH NAILS, GOING DOWN WITH

by Jon Wiederhorn

If you feel a bit spooked listening to *The Downward Spiral*, the second full-length album from Nine Inch Nails (alias Trent Reznor), it might have something to do with where the album was recorded. Reznor moved into the Beverly Hills house and set up studio in the living room where 24 years earlier the grisly Manson murders occurred. *The Downward Spiral* contains tracks with such Manson-esque titles as "Piggy" and "March of the Pigs," but Reznor says any connection with the Tate incident is purely coincidental. He claims he had no idea of the site's brutal history when he rented the house. But he does admit that it proved the ideal setting to create a record about pain and fear.

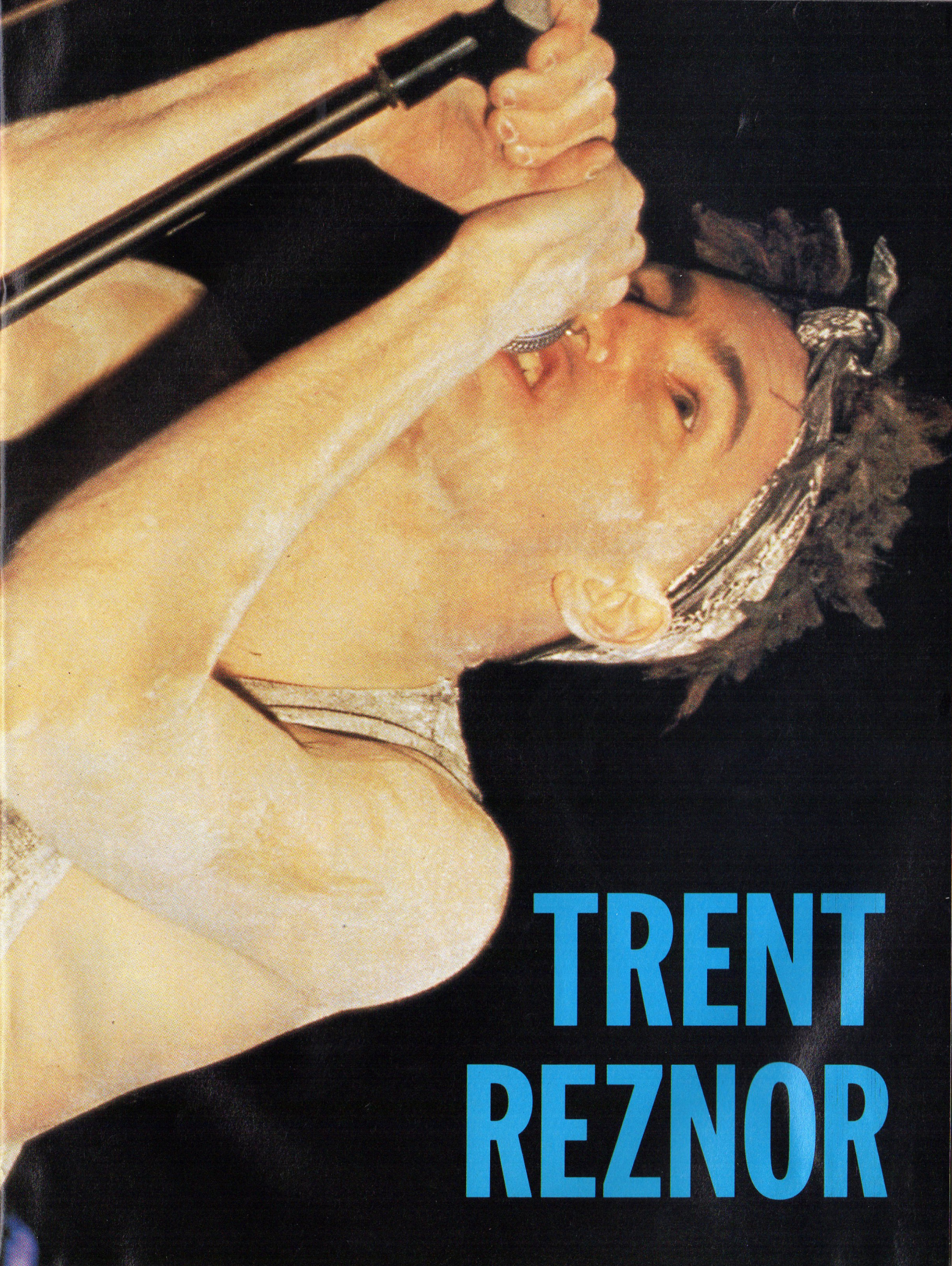
"The first month or so it was very frightening to even be there," says Reznor, who moved into the house shortly after the release of last year's platinum *Broken* EP. "Your mind plays tricks on you. And to be alone at night there with owls in the trees is like setting yourself up for a heart attack. But once I made peace with any of the spirits that might have been there, or the ones in my mind, it became pleasant to work in."

"I feel more motivated to write about being pained than I do being happy." —Trent Reznor

The actual process of working on the album was hardly pleasant, though. To capture *The Downward Spiral*'s sense of utter hopelessness, Reznor locked himself in the Tate house for over a year, avoiding contact with friends and family and immersing himself in his work completely. He intentionally placed himself in uncomfortable situations to feed off their negative energy—like choosing to record the album in Los Angeles, a city he loathes. "Looking back," says Reznor, "it was probably one of the best circumstances I could be in for the record, but it wasn't the most enjoyable of experiences."

Enjoyment plays no part in the Nine Inch Nails experience. Rather than seek out the brighter aspects of existence, Reznor focuses on degradation and despair. The most extreme example of Reznor's dark obsession is the video for "Happiness Is Slavery" (*Broken*). The

Trent Reznor grew up in the small town of Mercer, Pennsylvania. As a youth, he studied classical piano.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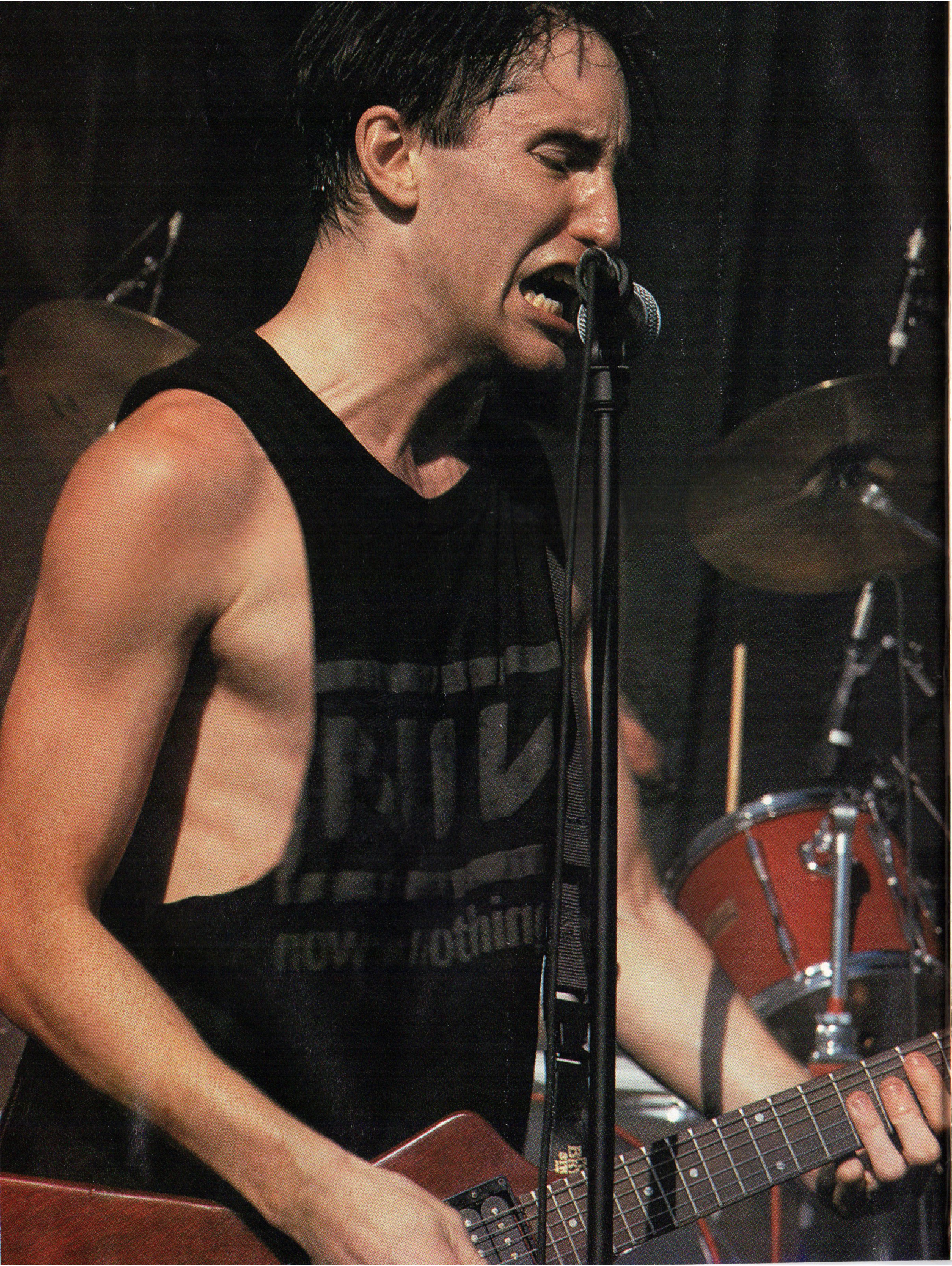

gruesome clip depicts a masochist undergoing unspeakable atrocities while strapped to an electric chair. Even more ghastly is an unreleased short film (created with the members of Coil) that looks like something out of a gory snuff movie.

"Darkness and desperation are obviously of interest to me," says the singer/guitarist/keyboardist/lyricist and all-around mastermind behind Nine Inch Nails. "I think it's just something that's chemically in me. And it provides a palette of something interesting to explore, almost scientifically at times. But it is a motivating force. And I feel more motivated to write about being pained than I do being happy."

As downers go, you can't get more down than *The Downward Spiral*, with its tales of infidelity, self-loathing and suicide, which is treated in graphic detail on the title track.

"I don't think I would ever do it," Reznor says, "because I look at it as the ultimate cop out. No matter how bad things get, I don't see that as the solution. I would hope that people don't get any pro-suicide ideas from my music because that's not what I'm trying to provoke. I used that song as a way of confronting my own self-destructive urges, rather than actually killing myself."

The album's harrowing electronic soundscapes echo the disturbing lyrical themes. *The Downward Spiral* sounds like a cross between Joy Division and Ministry, combining oppressive keyboards with sharp guitar stabs and staccato drum-machine bursts. It's the natural marriage between Nine Inch Nails' first release, the malicious, industrial-dance album *Pretty Hate Machine* and the far more caustic, riff-centric *Broken* EP. "It wasn't intended to be an amalgamation of everything I've done in the past; it was more of a conscious effort not to repeat or follow the logical direction *Broken* was pointing towards," corrects Reznor. "The new record might have some elements of *Pretty Hate Machine* because I wrote both of those albums on computer. I wrote *Broken* on guitar for the most part, and I found it somewhat limiting. I'm just more inspired by all the things you can do on a computer."

Broken exploded in torrents of rage, expressing the sentiments of someone on the verge of committing an unspeakable act. *The Downward Spiral* soaks in the introspective pain of a man who has screamed himself hoarse and is now wallowing in the misery of his own sore throat. "I think *Broken* and *The Downward Spiral* work together as a team in a way, because they were written back to back with no interruption in terms of touring. And they kind of express what I was going through at the time. I wanted *Broken* to be really angry, kind of like a punch in the face. I was pissed off about so many things, and I wanted the record to reflect that. I didn't want to convolute that message with slow tracks or dance tracks.

"With *Downward Spiral* I wanted to really examine the debris of that and see what I could make out of it. And maybe that involved bringing a lot more moodiness and atmosphere in the music and maybe a bit more lyrical vulnerability. To a large extent, the new record is me coming to terms with who I am and addressing that in a potentially ugly manner. When you peel back the skin sometimes you find that what you see is not always the person you thought you were."

This type of insecurity and confusion is the pulse of Nine Inch Nails' blackened heart. For Reznor, too much has happened too quickly. A small-town Pennsylvania boy and classically trained piano student, all he ever wanted was to make music. With the release of *Pretty Hate Machine* in 1989, it looked like his dream might come true. But by the time of the 1991 Lollapalooza tour, where he vented his spleen in front of 25,000 people everyday, his dreams started turning into nightmares.

Intimidated by all the attention, Reznor chose to avoid the public and was quickly labeled a pretentious, self-important snob. Soon after, according to Reznor, complications resulting from a dispute with TVT Records, which he felt wasn't supporting him properly, prevented Nine Inch Nails from releasing any material for two years (the label refutes the claim).

STEVE EICHNER

Guitarist Adrian Belew (above) and drummer Stephen Perkins helped out on 'The Downward Spiral.'

"I quite intentionally shot myself in the foot commercially with this record."—Trent Reznor

Last year, with the release of *Broken* on Interscope, Reznor returned with guns blazing. The EP was an instant hit, but to his dismay Trent's life had become completely consumed by Nine Inch Nails. "I have to accept the fact that I have nothing else now," he says. "I'm not complaining about that, but it doesn't lead to a real well-rounded perspective on things. I just tend to work in extremes. And with Nine Inch Nails I guess I wanted to see what would happen if I were to lose every other aspect of my life except trying to make this as good as it can be. I'm like that in every way. If I'm in love with somebody, it's something that goes all the way and is the most amazing, passionate, consuming thing or it's not happening."

While *The Downward Spiral* is an artistic triumph, it could well be a commercial failure. The songs are musically challenging, constantly experimenting with mood and tempo. But they lack the instantly recognizable hooks and choruses Nine Inch Nails has become famous for. "I quite intentionally have shot myself in the foot commercially with this record," admits Reznor. "I didn't do that just to screw myself up; I just wanted to create a record that expressed my experiences. There were points where I was thinking, 'Is anyone going to like this?' But eventually I came to my senses and realized that it's insane to try to write music for other people. I'm not doing stuff I think people won't like; I'm just doing what I feel I have to do. I hope some people do like it. But if they don't, I can still go to sleep at night knowing that I did what I felt was right."

"It wasn't the most enjoyable of experiences," says Trent of the recording of 'The Downward Spiral.'

JEFFREY MAYER

LONGPLAYERS

By M. Kleidermacher and Jeff Gilbert

REZNOR BARES ALL

PANTERA, FAR BEYOND VULGAR

Nine Inch Nails/*The Downward Spiral*

(Nothing/TVT/Interscope)

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So you thought *The Wall* was depressing? Wait till you hear *The Downward Spiral*—the second full-length album from Nine Inch Nails (a.k.a. Trent Reznor). Reznor makes Roger Waters sound like Mary Tyler Moore.

Like Pink Floyd's classic tale of despondency and hopelessness, *The Downward Spiral* works like a concept piece. Each song gives you another glimpse into Mr. Reznor's disturbed psyche, baring his loves, hates and fears to all the world. "Mr. Self Destruct," with the self-hating line "*I drag you down, I use you up, Mr. Self Destruct*," opens the program and sets the general tone. Along the way Reznor attacks Christianity ("Heresy"), deceitful lovers ("Reptile"), macho assholes ("Big Man With A Gun") and contemplates suicide ("The Downward Spiral"). "Hurt," the closing track, brings things full circle with another bit of self-loathing: "*I will let you down. I will make you hurt. I wear my crown of shit on my liar's chair.*"

This outpouring of emotion would probably be quite gripping, if only the music held up. Throughout *The Downward Spiral*, Reznor the songwriter seems to be at war with Trent the electronic whiz kid. The core of each of the songs (which range from speedy metallic forays to sensual dance grooves) is generally solid. And Reznor's singing is certainly powerful and convincing throughout. But Reznor ultimately sabotages his often potent vocal lines by drowning them in a flood of sampled noise effects. Often, a decent cut is burdened by interminable instrumental tracts. When Reznor does let the track breathe, the results are excellent—like the riveting "Hurt" and the hard-driving "Mr. Self Destruct." For the most part, though, *The Downward Spiral* is pretty rough going.

—Mordechai Kleidermacher

Pantera/*Far Beyond Driven*

(EastWest)

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With one gold album (*Cowboys From Hell*) under their belts and another one near platinum (*Vulgar Display of Power*), you'd think it was just about time for Pantera to start mellowing out a bit. Not these angry dudes. If anything, *Far Beyond Driven*, the third major-label album from the Texas aggro metallers, is their meanest and most hostile release to date.

For one thing, Phil Anselmo's drill-sergeant-from-hell vocals are even more brutal and distorted than ever—at times sounding like death metal. The album also features some of Pantera's weirdest and most dissonant compositions to date. "25 Years," for instance, is a truly fearsome number with a grinding wall of guitar noise that makes you feel like you've fallen into a cement mixer.

There's also more of Pantera's standard bludgeon. The old "power groove" is in truly vulgar form on songs like "Becoming," "I'm Broken" and "5 Minutes Alone," with fierce, catchy riffs and pissed-off vocal hooks that should ignite the mosh pits like a match to a tank of gasoline. Like the calm after the storm, the album ends on a mellow note with a soulful cover of Black Sabbath's spacey "Planet Caravan." All in all, it's quite Panter-iffic.

—Mordechai Kleidermacher

Various Artists/*The Crow (Soundtrack)*

(Atlantic)

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Between the movie soundtracks, the benefits, the tribute albums and Beavis and Butt-Head, these multi-band compilation albums are really becoming the things nowadays. But who's complaining? How cool is it to pick up a disc that has three or four of your favorite bands playing brand-new tracks.

The soundtrack to *The Crow* should give hard-rock fans many reasons to get excited. It's got crushing items from Pantera ("The Badge"), Rollins Band ("Ghostrider") and Helmet ("Milktoast"). And there's a boisterous jazz/metal/funk thing from Rage Against The Machine titled "Darkness." On the mellower end of the spectrum, the Stone Temple Pilots deliver the atmospheric, bluesy tune " Big Empty"—which will probably yield them another big hit. And if you want to just close your eyes and take off to a distant galaxy, turn on to The Cure's "Bum," an echoey track with rousing, churning rhythms. There's a lot more good stuff (including tracks by Nine Inch Nails, Jesus & Mary Chain and Medicine) on this soundtrack which has plenty to crow about.

—Mordechai Kleidermacher

Altered State/*Dos*

(Warner Bros.)

Pick Hit

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Say hello to the greatest unknown band in the world. God knows why this excellent album isn't getting a lot more attention—it certainly deserves it.

In the current genre-fied world of rock, Altered State is an outcast. None of the handy labels—grunge, metal, alternative, etcetera—even remotely fit this outfit (which is probably why nobody's heard of them). What do you call a band that plays epic progressive rock ("Thinkin' About Movin' To A Catatonic State") alongside magical pop songs ("Life On A Skateboard"), dips into something totally wacky ("Where Is Harrison Ford?") and tops it off with some U2-flavored inspirational rock ("If the World..."). Most importantly, they pull it all off like champs. What do you call such a band? Brilliant. What else?

—Mordechai Kleidermacher

Various Artists/*Alternative NRG*

(Hollywood Records)

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Yet another "earth first" inspirational compilation designed to rock your polluted world. Recorded and mixed entirely with solar power, *Alternative NRG* features live tracks from some of rock's well-known cause du jour soapboxers— from R.E.M. and U2 to Midnight Oil and Annie Lennox.

Of the album's diverse musical offering (rap, funk, pop, punk, reggae ...and Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E), the only studio track—by far the album's strongest—is Soundgarden's revised

Trent Reznor, Mr. Nine Inch Nails, reaches deep into his psyche on 'The Downward Spiral.'